Elizabethanne Boran and Crawford Gribben, eds., Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, 1550-1700

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interpective prism, “not as some complex via media between Rome and Geneva but a means whereby a political necessity was wedded to an ecclesial virtue” (245).

For Jenkins, Jewel’s works do not present a body of theological literature abundant with insight but instead represent a pedestrian reading of scriptural texts, a prosaic use of the early Church, and a banal approach to its theological topics. He was a “Puritan and a Prelate who affirmed the authority of Scripture and the primacy of the godly prince, an iconoclast in clerical vestments” (245–47). Jewel’s church had no way, in theory, to resolve its conflicts since it had no recourse or court of appeal beyond the prince, “neither to tradition, a general council, nor a magisterium” (249). In the introduction, Jenkins suggests, but without taking sides in the conflict, that Jewel reaches beyond his time to speak to the present distress afflicting the worldwide Anglican Communion. According to this reading, it is Jewel’s dilemmas that speak loudest.

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The “new British history” of the 1990s is not so new any more, but this collection provides yet another example of the ways in which it reshaped historical studies of Britain and Ireland. The essays here encompass two of the three kingdoms (usually separately—only the last chapter, by the late Richard Greaves, examines a topic in both Ireland and Scotland), and while at first glance one might place them all under the “center versus peripheries” category, where the center (England) had influence but often lacked the power to shape things on the peripheries, that would be a gross oversimplification. Several of these essays examine circumstances in which Dublin or Edinburgh functioned as centers but often with similar results. The common conclusion would seem to be that political control was always easier to establish than cultural hegemony.

The “Reformation” in the title is nearly all reformation of the Protestant sort. Elizabethanne Boran’s chapter on printing in early seventeenth-century Dublin at least considers the ways Catholics used the press but finds that the presses they usually used were those of Louvain, Douai, Rome, Brussels, or Salamanca. Her conclusion that print items (both Catholic and Protestant) were primarily aimed at those who already identified with the viewpoints expressed makes the seventeenth-century media look a lot like their twenty-first-century counterparts and also reinforces the conclusion of Andrew Pettegree in Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion (Cambridge, 2005) that print was more a tool of group identification than persuasion.

The most interesting contributions here are those that adapt older conceptual tools into new environments or seek to examine phenomena that are not obvious in the existing historiography. A good example of the former is John Coffey’s analysis of “the problem of Scottish Puritanism,” using as his point of departure David Mullan’s recent book Scottish Puritanism (Oxford, 2000). Mullan regarded his topic as an actual spiritual tendency that can be identified, although the label “puritan” was rarely used in early modern Scotland. Coffey’s interest is more in the use of the label itself. It appears that hardly anyone in Scotland except James VI and I used the term “puritan” before the controversy aroused by the Five Articles of Perth (1617). But in the highly charged atmosphere of the late 1630s, it became a common epithet, usually hurled by the bishops (and their supporters) at their critics. Thus Coffey sees the frequency of the term’s use as an index of religious controversy.
With the defeat of the bishops, it fell out of use again. Coffey concludes that its rarity in Scottish discourse is a reflection of the fact that “Scotland was a Puritan success story” (90).

Raymond Gillespie’s study of the enforcement of peace in the Irish Reformation will surprise those accustomed to seeing the religious history of early modern Ireland as one of unrelenting conflict. While the (Episcopal) Church of Ireland had taken over most of Ireland’s medieval parish churches by the early seventeenth century, Catholics still wanted to be buried in the old churchyards or in the churches themselves. “Many, though not all, Catholics could distinguish between the parish as a liturgical space . . . and the parish as an expression of local community identity” (194). Many of these theoretically Protestant churches had Catholic churchwardens, and in Gillespie’s account they seem almost like modern community centers that just happened to host Protestant churches on Sundays (the Catholics, of course, had to worship elsewhere). The level of cooperation that he finds between Catholic and Protestant notables is striking. And while we are used to assuming serious divisions between these camps, Gillespie also reminds us that Catholics were not necessarily united; the synods of the early seventeenth century, under the influence of Tridentine reform, sought to eliminate pilgrimages to holy wells, for example.

Of course, such cultural changes were hard to enforce from above. John Young analyzes the efforts of the Covenanters to use parliamentary legislation to reform Scottish society in 1639–51, highlighting in particular the government of 1649–50, which he labels “a radical regime,” due to its efforts to eliminate lay patronage in the Kirk, legislate stricter Sabbath enforcement, make blasphemy a capital offense, and so on (134). Few who have studied the period would quarrel with that assessment, but Young fails to make the leap from legislation to enforcement. The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland is littered with laws passed at the urging of ministers, which were rarely if ever enforced. The Covenanter parliaments were radical in terms of pious pronouncements, but by the same measure so was the parliament of 1563, which instituted the death penalty for notorious adultery—a step from which the parliament of 1650 drew back, reading but not passing a similar law.

The question of whether religiously inspired laws were really intended to spur conversion or merely aimed to give privileged status to those passing them is considered by Alan Ford in his essay on Protestant attitudes toward religious coercion in Ireland. The pattern he discerns in the early seventeenth century was one in which the goal switched from persecution aimed at securing conversion to a grudging toleration, which was happy to make Catholics pay fines for their practices. Indeed, as several of the essays in this collection make clear, enforcing Reformation in Ireland was largely a doomed effort. Not so in Scotland, where the question was how much Reformation to enforce.

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Books investigating the relation between the Continental Reformation and England are always welcome additions to studies of early modern intellectual history. This work concentrating on the influence of the Lutheran theologian and Wittenberg professor, Philip Melanchthon, brings to light an important but oft neglected aspect of the development of early Protestantism in England. Unfortunately, as praiseworthy as the topic may be, the author fails fully to deliver an essay worthy of it.

The author investigates Philip Melanchthon’s relation to the English Reformation, starting with the Henrician reforms and Thomas Cranmer and ending with the reign of Elizabeth I, whose private religious practices and beliefs, he argues, were shaped by Melanchthonian